BEN

WHIRRAKEE

May 2014

Vol. 35 No. 4

Registered by Australia Post. Publication No. VBH4462

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552.

Website: www.bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au

E-mail address: info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au

Office Bearers for 2013 - 2014

President	Richard Goonan	e-mail: richard.goonan@optusnet.com.au
Vice President	Bill Holsworth	54434063
Secretary/Public Officer	Matt Comer	0409162627
Minute Secretary (gen meet'gs)	Kerrie Norris *(still require a backup)*	5447 8017
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
Excursion organiser	John Lindner	54483406
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier & Maryann Hill	54430137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Jan Orr	
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407427179
Whirrakee contact/editor	Sabine Wilkens (s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au)	54432797
Co-editor	Richard Goonan	
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Gemma Candy	0423634416
Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $40; Family $50; Concession: Single $35; Family $40. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $40.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with members sharing their recent natural history observations . The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner, Jenny Shield, Diana Collier, Devi Shanty

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188. To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 35, No. 4, May 2014
ISSN 0812-423X

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short notices	various contributors	3
Colour photo section	various contributors	4
Observations of Black-Browed Albatross	Rob Watkins	8
Tree story (Part 2)	John Lindner	9

ARTICLES: Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they provide and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note

Thanks to Sabine's organisation, it was a smooth transition to fill in as Whirrakee editor for a month during her leave. The BFNC have been very lucky to have had such a dedicated and diligent editor for our monthly newsletter. Along with the folding team, who assist with the preparation of the newsletter each month, it would be impossible to maintain the Whirrakee without these behind-the-scenes contributions. Thanks must also go to those who have contributed their articles, notes, photos and observations over the years, please keep them coming.

Front page photographer: Richard Goonan

Autumn Greenhood flowering in the Kangaroo Gully area along the Goldfields Walking Track. Following the good autumn rains this year, early flowering species have been able to take advantage of the season. Make sure you find time to search around your favourite spots in the forest for these and other early flowering species before they disappear for another year.

Short Notices

Successful garden working-bee completed – come and join our next event:

The recent working-bee in the BFNC garden was a great effort by those who attended. A surprisingly large load of dead material was removed to make way for new plantings later in the season. All club members are encouraged to get involved with the maintenance of our garden and it's a great way to meet other members. The next working-bee will be in June (date to be decided) so watch out in the diary page for the date. This will be an opportunity to get an early start on weeding and hopefully plant some fresh plants into the garden.

Observations in focus:

To encourage a greater emphasis on the sharing of our local knowledge, general meeting have been restructured. Meetings now begin with time to sharing observations. This will include opportunity for the audience to report observations directly, a brief look at the BFNC Bowerbird project (http://www.bowerbird.org.au/), and noting observations submitted through the BFNC website or hardcopy record sheet. Remember - field naturalists are all about recording and sharing observations, especially what's happening in your favourite local patch!

Club member's photos requested:

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has a new website, so make sure you have a look! To make the site attractive we need your photos to add throughout the different pages. Photos can be of local wildflowers, birds, landscapes, insects etc, or perhaps you have a good photo from a club excursion old or new. Please let us know if you have something to share to help promote the club. Photos can be collected at monthly meetings if you bring them along on a memory stick or CD, contact the committee for further information.

Would you consider leading an excursion?

Excursions are an important part of field naturalist activities, all club members can contribute to the running of excursions, so if you have a favourite spot you would like to share please contact the committee for assistance. Note: Leaders do not need to be experts, and excursions can be as simple as a short walk, so everyone can be involved.

Autumn Greenhoods – Dale Little

The recent rain provided the impetus to visit the Whipstick to hunt for Autumn Greenhoods (*Diplodium revolutum*) along our favourite track. Turning into it, I was amazed to see a colony of greenhoods (see photo on page 5), an area where we had not found them before. We counted in excess of one hundred and fifty flowers in an area less than one metre square. The plants were robust and the blooms large. Close by was another patch, numbering some fifty or so blooms. There were also other small areas of orchids and signs that more blooms were to come. This area was part of a control burn a season or so ago. Travelling onto our "usual" viewing area, we were disappointed when we found no evidence of the orchids: either basal leaves or blooms. Earlier drainage works along the track have altered this area considerably. Interestingly, we were recently sent an article from the Canberra Times, dated 1 April, that reported on the first sighting of this orchid in the bushland around Black Mountain.

Editors Note: If you are interested in seeing these orchids you can also find patches flowering around the One Tree Hill summit area. In areas recently burnt around Spring Gully (burnt last year and the year before) I have struggled to find many plants this season where they grew before? Tiny Greenhoods are also flowering and Tall Greenhoods have emerged and are growing rapidly. Midge orchids have almost finished already and it's worth looking out for Parson's Bands before they finish for the year.

Above Left: Dale Little's colony of Autumn Greenhoods in the Whipstick.
Above Right: Autumn Greenhood in Kangaroo Gully area photographed by Richard Goonan.
Centre: *Crowea exalata* subsp. *revoluta,* is an early flowering shrub and continues flowering for several months. The buds are often darker pink and the older flowers can fade to almost white. The species is found in the dryer areas of local forest, and is predominantly restricted in its range to small areas of mallee vegetation north of Bendigo, although it is also sometimes found in adjacent Box-Ironbark vegetation
Bottom Left: Spreading Wattle (*Acacia genistifolia*) is another early flowering species and also flowers for several months throughout autumn/winter/early spring. This common and conspicuous species when flowering is a welcome sign of life returning to the forest after the heat of summer has subsided. Where abundant it forms spectacular displays when flowering during a good season. Although 'common' this species is relatively slow growing following planned burning, repeated burning at less that 15-20 year intervals could significantly reduce the abundance of this species, Many areas close to settlements are currently planned to be burnt at five year intervals.

Left: Have you noticed the dying trees? Many local Stringybarks have become stressed and sprouted epicormic growth. Some of these trees now appear to be dying despite the recent rains which may have come too late. The tree pictured may yet survive but many have not.

Centre: Cuckoo Bee – *Thyreus caeruleopunctatus* photographed in a vegie garden attending Sweet Basil flowers. This species parasitise the nests of Blue Banded Bees (*Amagilla sp*). This image and others along with further info can be found on the BFNC project page on the Bowerbird website. Register to join the clubs project or one of the hundreds of other projects.

Next Page: Autumn Fungi photographed by Joy Clusker and Richard Goonan.
Joy's photos are from the fernery in Rosalind Park where the moist conditions provide suitable habitat for a variety of fungi species not generally found locally. **Top Left:** This Cinnamon fungi was found growing at the base of a tree around the summit area of Mt Alexander in early April following the first autumn rains (RG). **Top Right:** *Mycena viscidocruenta*, you have to dig in the leaf litter to find this very tiny fungi which appears after rain (JC). **Centre:** *Pyronema omphalodies*, following recent rain (showers 2-3 weeks prior and approx. 15mm one week prior) this fungi was found occurring extensively throughout forest areas burnt one year previously (Autumn 2013 DEPI planned burn). This fungi is almost exclusively found on areas of burnt soil and charcoal, often growing in association with colonising moss. Uncommon in Box-Ironbark forests due to a lack of fire and not always found following planned burns. Although increased planned burning is expected to provide greater opportunity for this species, it appears to prefer specific condition (either fire type or weather following the fire) and may remain sporadic (RG) **Bottom Left:** *Ganoderma austral* (artists conk) is a bracket fungi and grows out horizontally from wood (JC). **Bottom Right:** *Flammulina velutipes*, this species grows on wood and forms crowded clumps of fruiting bodies (JC).

Black-Browed Albatross - Observations from the Falkland Islands

Rob Watkins

During a two weeks stay on the Falkland Islands last January, Cynthia and me enjoyed a few days on Saunders Island where in 1766 British settlers established the first sheep farm. The Falkland Islands comprise two larger islands, East and West Falkland and many smaller islands numbering over two hundred, all of which are practically treeless and sparsely populated. Of a total population of 2,900, 2,200 reside in Stanley the capital. An unspecified number man a large military base on East Falkland at Mount Pleasant which is also the terminal for all external flights. One legacy of the 1982 war remaining today, is the presence of many land mines laid by Argentina near several lovely beaches. Being constructed of plastic, they are difficult to detect and probably will remain active into the distant future.

Native geese kept ground cover to such a low level we asked our farmer hosts how stock manage for feed in winter. We were very surprised to learn both sheep and cattle manage well on the abundant kelp. Our accommodation on Saunders was a comfortable bungalow ten kilometres from the farm settlement, but within sight of a clifftop rookery of Black-browed Albatross. (Con't p 9)

Patrolling the rookery

Bonding

Chicks are never left unguarded

These masters of the sea mate for life and build a pedestal cup nest of mud and grass for a single chick. Rookeries were elevated and overlooking the nearby ocean providing ideal conditions for such long winged birds to launch into flight.

Bonding involved a pair facing each other with fanned out tails and repeatedly clocking beaks together. Preening was also a strong expression even in early stages and maintained while rearing young.

Our first visit to this rookery left a grand impression. Hundreds of nests sited closely together overlooked a steep slope sweeping down to the ocean, a scene that continued for about two kilometres. On eight foot wings (2.4m) large numbers of albatross patrolled the rookery and nearby sea, some gliding effortlessly into a strong wind. After walking to the far end of the rookery and fascinated by the gliding ability of these majestic birds, I sat low down in the lee of a rock to fully appreciate the surroundings and activity.

After some twenty minutes the constant procession of gliding albatross had accepted my presence and were passing me at speed by only a metre or so. I was surprised when one bird gliding by, turned its head 90 degrees and looked my way in an enquiring manner. Some fifteen minutes or so later another bird caught my attention because it was coming in low and on a collision course. When about only five metres away this bird dropped its webbed feet and with a couple of steps stood there carefully folding its enormous wings. I kept the camera down low and simply enjoyed the rare moment. After about a minute a couple more steps were taken towards me, then curiosity satisfied, the visitor slipped over the cliff edge and within seconds was skimming the ocean far below.

Many years ago I learned that quietly sitting still with a camera or binoculars could result in rich experiences with either birds or animals, but such a deliberate visit made this experience quite extraordinary. Well before my own observations began, the very lifestyle of the albatross remaining at sea for five or seven years after fledging, put these birds into a category that earned extra interest and respect. The parents never left their chick unguarded and spent much time preening their emerging feathers, often to the point of the youngsters distress, especially when both were preening a tiny head at the same time. More than once I saw a chick protesting loudly to be left alone, before moving in the nest to a position where parents found access difficult, usually facing out backwards between the overhead parents legs. Albatross chicks were never left unguarded. Watching these majestic birds tenderly caring for their tiny young and effortlessly coping with the turbulent winds of these southern oceans, was a delightful way to spend some time. Unlike most other species that squabbled noisily with their nesting rookery neighbours, albatross were quietly tolerant and maintained a serene dignity well befitting these majestic creatures.

John Lindner's tree story, continued see April Whirrakee for Part 1.

Other bird observations in the back garden

The intact rear garden was aggressively guarded during the building renovations: "You damage, you die". It is actually quite disgusting to patronize intelligent tradesmen, but if you want your urgent, heart-felt message understood, you might as well use simple, unambiguous language. The only plant damaged was my Banksia Rose, and I suppose the "Native Nazis" can snarl "Good riddance" but it was only temporarily brought to a halt and recovered.

There is a good variety of native plants in this garden, both exotic and indigenous. The shrubs are dense and produce abundant flowers, especially since I regularly give them a good haircut. But the best species as far as the birds are concerned are the Emu Bushes (*Eremophila spp*), which flower for long periods.

New Holland Honeyeaters generally dominate the flowers at the expense of other species, and

can be very aggressive. Nobody else is allowed to approach. Apart from vigorous foraging for nectar, I have observed foliage bathing in the outer layers of a Hopbush (*Dodonaea spp*) during a light shower, and hysterical, squabbling congregations at the bird bath when literally dozens of birds seem to arrive from nowhere and behave crazily for half an hour or so. These birds seem to disappear elsewhere for long periods.

White-plumed Honeyeaters, which are quite subservient to the New Hollands, can then get in for their share. While the latter were reigning, the White-plumeds could only dash in quickly, or else concentrate on the lerp found on the Green Mallee (*Eucalyptus viridis*) out in the street garden. I would very much like to know whether the birds take the sugary cover of the lerp, or the tiny insect crouching beneath, or both: it is all too rapid and on too small a scale to see. I have observed these birds hanging upside on Emu Bushes, and brief mid-air hovering while gathering nectar from arching sprays of flowers.

Blackbirds, with their bright-eyed, jerky, mechanical movements, wreak havoc on the newly planted stuff, as they violently tweak out the mulch and scatter it everywhere in search of prey. My secret weapon to deter them - old tyre tubes placed like ugly black doughnuts on the mulch – sort of work, some of the time. I have observed the adults feeding fledged young right up to the end of November.

There is a wide variety of birds which use the water in the raised pool for drinking and bathing. The bowl is placed between two quite dense shrubs, one of which overhangs the water. That way the birds can approach quite surreptitiously under cover. I have two sturdy sticks, which aid perching, placed just over the surface. Visitors include White-backed magpies, Little Ravens (followed by their young), House Sparrows, Willy Wagtails, Mudlarks, Crested Pigeons, Blackbirds and the two honeyeaters mentioned above. The water is only shallow so that they can stand in it. It is quite amazing how birds seem to be highly attracted to clean water, especially in what is a very dry area. With their uninhibited splashing, they soon lower the level. Not only that, but the bowl quickly grows a coating of algae, even when it is cold. So it is a regular chore to clean it and replace the water.

Ross Street birds

In complete contrast to the back, the garden at the front had to be relandscaped and replanted, having suffered complete obliteration during the building phase. The only surviving plant is the Green Mallee, mentioned above, which resprouted from the base five months after the trunk was cut – it was a great moment when I noticed tender little red leaf buds emerging from beneath the damaged bark only inches from the ground. One year later the plant is two metres tall and almost as wide with its many slender stems. The other plants are of course too small to provide any shelter or food.

The wide, dusty area of Ross Street is pretty much bare of understorey, but there are quite a few good-sized Sugar Gums and one notable, large, symmetrical Yellow Gum (*Eucalytus leucoxylon*) These trees flower quite prolifically and regularly (the former in Spring-Summer and the latter in Winter), attracting quite a few honeyeaters such as Red Wattlebirds, as well as New Holland and the White-plumed Honeyeaters. Some of the very highest dead branches of the Sugar Gums function in exactly the same way as the big dead tree at the back.

Another tree with a great attraction

In the middle of the group of Sugar Gums, there is a large southern Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) or rather was, as it has been long dead, having been unable to withstand a previous drought. It has been progressively shedding its canopy limbs, but near the top of the trunk is a large hole which goes down nicely to a depth of about 500 cm.

Many birds have been interested in this hollow over the years, but the only ones which successfully raised young were Galahs in 2012. Other birds which have inspected the hollow at times include Eastern Rosellas,

Wood Ducks and White Cockatoos. Unfortunately Indian Mynahs have become residents lately. Well, I've finally had the courage to climb the ladder and block the hole with some wire netting.

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday May 14, 7.30pm

Dr Michael Bayly School of Botany, University of Melbourne. 'The plant family Rutaceae in Australia and New Caledonia: phylogeny, classification, and biogeography'.

Family Nature Club

Family Nature Club activities will resume in 2014 and occur on the third Saturday of the month, please register to receive monthly activity details via their email notification service.

Registration:

Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326

http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.

All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall. Next meeting: 20th of May.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Environment and Primary Industries.

Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

WRIN meetings held on the 1st Saturday of the month at 1pm the Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall

---

The Wellsford Big Trees Walk

Date: Sunday 18th May,

Where: Meet at Gunyah Picnic Area 10.30a.m. (map to be supplied on registration)

Note: No toilet facilities are available. The walk should take about 2 hours and speakers will tell us about the area as we proceed.

Registration essential: **wellsfordinfo@gmail.com** or phone Stuart on 5443 1326.

Info on registration: Map of Wellsford and mud map of Gunyah.

Bring drink, snack, sturdy shoes, raincoat, hat, 30+, and lunch if you wish to stay for the camp fire afterwards.

Drive in convoy to beginning of Big Trees Walk after talk on history of the area by historian Robyn Ballinger.

BFNC – Monthly excursion – June 2014

Geology - Mountains to Goldfields: Treasures of the earth.

Date: Sunday **15 June 2014**

Hours: 8.30 am to 5.00 pm, Meet at clubrooms, Golden Square.

Leader: Eric Wilkinson 5446 8736

Organiser: John Lindner 5448 3406
jwl.bendigo@gmail.com

General trip route:

1. South of Porcupine Overpass
2. Fogarty's Gap
3. Mount Tarrengower, general
4. Mount Tarrengower, granodiorite/hornfels contact zone
5. Near Mt Tarrengower, ordovician rock cutting
6. Maldon,Cairn Curran Road, granodiorite
7. Cairn Curran Reservoir
8. Castlemaine, anticline on Lyttleton Street
9. Mount Alexander, Dog Rocks
10. Mount Alexander, Layton's Upper Quarry

Notes and map provided on the day.

Trip distance: about 150 kilometers total.

REGISTATION: Please contact John Lindner: telephone (leave a message),or via email. Make sure you include your telephone number as a return contact.

COST: $15 as a contribution to the cost of the bus. Payable in cash on the day (bring correct notes please).